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SUBJECT: IBB'S DAUGHTER WEDS; THE NATION TURNS OUT

CLASSIFIED BY COUNSELOR JAMES MAXSTADT FOR REASON 1.5 (D)

11. (U) The thirty-three year old daughter of former Nigerian head of state Ibrahim Babangida (IBB) tied the knot on September 6 with Bashir Lado Garba, a nephew of the deceased former head of state Gen. Sani Abacha who had driven IBB from office. Abacha's eldest surviving son, Mohammed, was best man at the event which attracted virtually everyone currently or previously involved with Nigerian politics. An Embassy poloff attended too.

12. (U) Wedding-related events took place in Abuja and Kano as well as IBB's home in Minna, Niger State. In Minna, over 20,000 guests made the trip for the wedding itself. With two exceptions, all former heads of state or their families were represented. Shehu Shagari, the elected president who was removed from office in 1983, and Muhammadu Buhari, the general who deposed Shagari and who is still fighting the widely disputed 2003 election, did not attend. Other guests included virtually all former flag officers of the Nigerian armed forces, 31 sitting governors, 64 senators, 70 representatives, current and past ministers and permanent secretaries, the President's wife, the Vice President and

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numerous former politicians. The inclusion of two of MKO Abiola's wives at the head table along with IBB, who annulled Abiola's election in 1993, and Mohammed Abacha, whose father then forced IBB out of power, highlighted the attempt of presenting an image of reconciliation. Complicated stuff, and the machinations for the 2007 race for president were unmistakable.

13. (C) During the wedding reception, Mohammed Abacha tried to address the crowd. Claiming his right as the best man, he approached the microphone. Former head of state General Abdulsalami Abubakar, along with several other elders at the head table, advised him that this occasion was not for "small boys."

14. (U) Amid the speculation about IBB's planned 2007 run for the Presidency, posters appeared throughout Minna touting Abia Governor Orji Kalu. While the press reported "Kalu for President 2007" posters, they were actually leftovers from his aborted 2003 run for the top spot in Nigeria.

15. (C) COMMENT: The crowd was overwhelming and the arduous task of hiking up to two kilometers up the hill to IBB's residence was too much for some retired generals and civil servants. The Vice President, one of IBB's expected 2007 challengers, made the hike -- unusual exertion in a country which values the perquisites of office highly. The aura surrounding IBB continues among Nigeria's elite, fueled in no small part by the wealth he carted away on leaving the helm of the nation. But while the elite were enjoying his hospitality, the rest of the town remained nonplussed by the commotion, continuing the daily task of eking out a living undistracted by the pomp.

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